



Roosevelt Pitt, Jr.

Charles The Chef, Inc.
CEO

A Cartoon Chef Your Kids Will Love

—Denise Brodey

Why isn't there a cartoon character that can encourage kids to make smart eating choices? That was the question Roosevelt Pitt, Jr., of Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, had when he was struggling to help his nephew Michael, learn to eat better. When he couldn't find one, the comic book author decided to write one, creating the storyline and characters for what would become the colorful hit comic, Charles the Chef. "Cartoon characters can influence kids in positive ways," says Pitt, now CEO of Charles the Chef, Inc., "If we can get kids excited about good food, we can break the patterns that cause childhood obesity."

The country is filled with Michaels—children whose weight goes from normal to out-of-control at a young age. "Suddenly, my nephew couldn't run, had severe constipation and self-esteem issues—and he was only four!" Pitt, a father himself, was alarmed. The problem for his nephew, he says, seemed to be that he spent too much time playing video games, ate too few meals at home with family and downed portions that could have fed three adults.

Roosevelt also saw the challenges his sister, a single mom, faced in raising Michael. "I looked at the dynamics of her life. She was always on the go and it impacted him. She didn't even have time to take him to the park! It hit me that a lot of kids are in this situation."

With Michael's lack of activity and good nutrition on his mind, Pitt called Mshindo Kuumba, an illustrator and friend. Together they cooked up Charles, a friendly, colorful character kids can relate to. "Obesity isn't just about health; it's about the mental conditioning of the child, their attitude towards themselves and their ability to perform." The cheerful cartoon character is designed to get families back into the kitchen and making healthy meals they enjoy. "One of Charles the Chef's phrases is, 'There's more to the kitchen than the microwave.' That's important because if you teach a kid to cook, you empower them."

Working through foundations, schools and PTAs, Charles the Chef (and Pitt) teaches well-balanced cooking. The message is always if you eat better, you live better."

No one knows that better than Michael. Twelve years ago he couldn't run, now he's on the football team. He still struggles with his weight, but the early intervention prevented him from becoming obese. "And he's aware," says Pitt, "He calls me, we talk about choices. He's paying attention to what he eats."

If you'd like to have Charles the Chef come to your school or organization, bookings are available through his website www.charlesthechef.com or request by email at rpitt@charlesthechef.com.

Charles the Chef is a partner of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation—www.HealthyWeightCommit.org.

— By Denise Brodey